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The Diem Disaster

Three Senate committees are examining the test ban treaty to assure themselves that it is not, as the treaty's opponents claim, a "Communist trap," or a "blow to American interests."

That is as it should be. But we wonder whether the Senate in its role as foreign policy watchdog should not be showing as much interest in the grim developments in Vietnam. How did we get into a mess which daily grows worse? The repression of the Buddhists has been followed by an equally brutal crackdown on the students. Saigon is described as "slowly being ringed with detention camps."

What difference is there between President Diem's and Ho Chi Minh's autocracy? Our representatives in Saigon are now reported to be undergoing a rough awakening. They are at last concluding there had

better be an alternative to sinking or swimming with Diem.

But where is the Senate in all this? Sen. Wayne Morse has been raising questions that more of his colleagues should be asking. Why, he wants to know, is Vietnam "America's responsibility alone?" More basically, how did we get so completely committed to Diem in the first place? Was it, Morse asks, and as Homer Bigart of the New York Times has written, a CIA decision, one, incidentally, which was opposed by the U. S. Ambassador to Vietnam at the time, Gen. J. Lawton Collins?

Perhaps "no good alternative policy" was possible, as Eric Sevareid has suggested. But the American people are entitled to see the record. And that is what a Senate inquiry would achieve.